

Follow-Up Message from Leslie Charles

It would be impossible for me to begin this follow up reminder without saying what a thrill it was to visit the Goddard Space Flight Center. I'm still elated and both family and friends have patiently and lovingly tolerated my enthusiasm. On my office wall hangs the lovely plaque I was given that day and I look at it often, with pride. Thank you for your enthusiastic response to my presentation on *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?* and I hope you are using your new awareness of the ten cranky trends to fend off pulses of impatience and irritation.

You may recall that those two reactions are the classic symptoms of crankiness and if you're regularly experiencing either impatience or irritation (or both) you are at least a candidate for this social affliction. The good news? Crankiness can be cured. The bad news? It's in your hands. Quality of life at work, at home, and in between is up to you. This is a perfect time to reread your materials from our session, and I invite you to continue reviewing them on a weekly basis. We all need constant exposure to positive ideas in our anxious, edgy world that feeds on bad news, trivia, and commercial opportunism.

Where and when, did we as a society decide that life was supposed to be perfect or hassle free? Where and when did people decide that it's appropriate to be rude; that being polite takes too long, and that we should get everything we want when we want it? When exactly was it that we confused expectation with entitlement? During my speech you might remember my comment about how my heart is in public sector: I perceive that government agencies (especially NASA, because what you do is so visible to the public) are particularly hard hit by this blending of expectation and entitlement. You are expected to take on almost unfathomable projects, and succeed, with little tolerance for failure. And paradoxically, the more you succeed, the higher the public's expectation for your next project.

There's also the issue of meeting the demands of an ever-increasing workload with a diminished work force. As a culture that's traditionally fostered a "we can do it" attitude, you are now in a position where you can't do it all. You have to prioritize. You might recall my saying that we are no longer living in an era of time management; indeed, we have shifted into an era of choice management and the better you become at making conscious choices, the more effective you will be.

This offers you and your work team the opportunity to communicate; to discuss, weigh, and decide what actions or projects are most appropriate, and why. It's a constant process, by the way. I'm not suggesting this approach is easy, although the prospect of possible burnout is way more difficult in the long run. In my book I talk about "Reality Bites" and the idea of sinking your teeth into hard truths about life today: Life is not perfect. Accept it. Inconveniences will occur. Deal with it. Mistakes will happen. Fix them and get on with it. People will annoy you. Let it

go. You get the idea: “Reality Bites” are a welcome necessity in today’s tense, overly sensitive world.

Following my speech, I hope you are monitoring yourself more closely as you go about your day. For example, how often do you feel a surge of anger over inconsequential things; common irritants that don’t qualify for the big picture screen? Get a grip! Put things in perspective. Remember to ask yourself if this is a small, medium, or large annoyance and consciously make a choice to appropriately match your reaction to the incident. You’ll feel better, experience less stress, and maintain your self-control.

Next, determine how many times a day you find yourself hurrying and rushing not only yourself but others (this is especially critical if you are a manager or supervisor). If you’re the type who dashes through your day, trying to move at the speed of light, stop! Consciously slow down your pace when you drive, walk, and talk. Listen more. Criticize less. Check yourself before you speak and chances are you won’t appear so cranky.

Chronic rushing and hurrying raises your stress level, and stress, like static cling, accumulates; it builds and builds and will ‘zap’ you at the most inopportune moment unless you take proper precautions. Use the Quick Stop: several times a day, stop whatever you’re doing and do a quick mind/body check. What are you thinking? How is your body feeling? This technique alone will tell you a lot about yourself and if you’re spending too much time in what I call the Hot Zone.

Of course, you can’t treat your crankiness until you know where it’s coming from, and that’s why I created the ten Cranky Quizzes, which you will find on <http://www.WhyIsEveryoneSoCranky.com>. I invite you to visit the web site where you’ll find some refreshing ideas that will encourage you to employ the stress-reducing Anti-Cranky Alternatives I’ve already mentioned.

So where do we go from here? I’d like to remind you about my comments on change; that organizational change doesn’t really happen from the outside in. It happens from the inside out. It happens through its people. It happens when you take on your own behavior as a ‘personal project and follow it through the same way you would with a mission. I’m living proof that this process works. It’s helped me learn to not just survive, but to thrive, in spite of numerous hardships and setbacks. You know the drill. You’ve done it countless times at work. Take the same approach with your life, imperfect though it may be.

Think about your mission in life and what contributions you can make to your family, your work team, and the community of our culture. What is your vision of who you can be and what your life and work are all about? What are your operating values? Just as an organization operates from founding principles, so can you.

Think 'Me, Inc.' and define what you stand for because making an organization better happens through its people. NASA has accomplished so much and there is still room to grow. When everyone takes an active part in the process, big things happen. When they don't, things stand still, or the organization simply experiences a series of false starts, which raises everyone's frustration level while lowering trust. I'd like to leave you with the following thoughts:

- ?? What force has made successful NASA missions a reality, in spite of hardship, adversity, and even failures? Its workforce: its people!
- ?? What force keeps striving for new knowledge and achievements in space exploration? Its workforce: its people!
- ?? What force continues expanding the world of possibilities? Again, its workforce: its people!

This gives you a sense of your potential, and that takes us to what my job is all about; to connect people with their potential. Your job? It's to follow up:

- ?? Think forward; let the bad things go.
- ?? Think service; be there to do all you can.
- ?? Think community: constantly try to connect.
- ?? Think mission; keep on keeping on.

These principles help you feel proud of your past. They help you prepare for your future. They are as relevant to your personal life as they are to the important work you do. Think of what NASA has accomplished. Think of the small victories happening at the Center every day. You know, in a literal sense, that when you reach for the stars, the possibilities are limitless. The same applies to your life.

Thank you.

Leslie Charles